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### Myths and Realities - What is the Women, Peace and Security Agenda?

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Myths and Realities – What is the Women, Peace and Security Agenda? GJA Student Ambassador Report for PSRP (<http://www.politicalsettlements.org/2015/12/08/madeleine-rees/>)

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Dec**Author :** Harriet Cornell(<http://www.globaljusticeacademy.ed.ac.uk>)**Category :**Conflict (<http://www.politicalsettlements.org/category/themes>)

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([HTTP://WWW.POI](http://www.politicalsettlements.org/2015/12/08/madeleine-rees/)

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**Rebecca Smyth is a Global Justice Academy Student Ambassador for 2015-16. The Political Settlements Research Programme has partnered with the GJA in this initiative, to bring fresh opinions on key PSRP themes and projects to a broader audience. In this post, Rebecca reflects on the 2015 Chrystal Macmillan Lecture, which was delivered by Madeleine Rees. Madeleine Rees is Secretary General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a post which she took up in 2010.**

Madeleine Rees is some woman for one woman. Whip-smart, no-nonsense and with a faint air of the rock 'n' roll, her lecture was as much a call to (pacifist) arms as a speech on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

Beginning with a brief overview of the development of international law, Rees introduced her first key argument: that the law is a useful tool, but an imperfect one. Resolution 1325 had the potential to be transformative and to provide women real access to high-level decision making around issues of war and peace. However – spoiler alert – it didn't quite work out that way. According to Rees, this is because it failed to address the root causes of conflict: the need for disarmament and strategies to end militarism. By not tackling them, conflict is only perpetuated.



(<http://www.politicalsettlements.org/files/2015/12/liberia-women.jpg>)

*Liberian women demonstrate at the American Embassy in Monrovia at the height of the civil war, 2003.*

The first real opportunity to make use of Resolution 1325 came during the peace negotiations following the war in Kosovo. Women had been active throughout the conflict in areas such as managing refugees, protecting those subjected to sexual violence, and fostering Serb-Kosovar cooperation. However, they were totally excluded from the peace negotiations.

Any transformative potential inherent in Resolution 1325 was further curtailed by the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. For Rees, the terrorist attacks marked the beginning of the current crisis within the UN and the wider world. It prompted “a horrific war on an abstract noun”, an illegal war of aggression that violated and undermined international law, humanitarian law, and human rights with impunity. And it continues on in Crimea, Ukraine, Syria and beyond. This is because militarisation has become the default reaction to any crisis.

To understand militarisation, Rees led us through a brief and brilliant synopsis of the concepts of gender equality, masculinity, patriarchy, and neoliberalism, in order to demonstrate how these interact and feed into violence and conflict.

For Rees, ‘gender equality’ is something of a contradiction in terms. Gender is a concept in need of scrutiny, and were equality achieved, it would in fact render the concept of gender itself neutral, redundant. What is really at stake, she argued, is the “good old-fashioned issue of sex discrimination.” Rather than stepping back, reading Judith Butler and getting into discourse analysis, current politics reduces ‘gender equality’ to a tokenistic ‘add-women-and-stir’ approach. This is due to the constraints of operating within the system of patriarchy, propped up by the artificial construction of masculinity, particularly militarised masculinity. Militarisation is characterised by ‘hard security’ and the erosion of human rights. Neoliberalism, which is essentially all of this together plus economics, is an ideology that plays out at international level. In light of all this, it is little surprise that grafting 1325 onto a masculinist, militarised system was never going to work.

The interplay of these factors – gender, patriarchy, militarisation – ultimately results in violence and conflict. The political economy is about the allocation of resources, namely power, in itself a highly gendered concept. In a conflict situation, the political economy becomes bifurcated along gender lines and militarised masculinities and femininities emerge. One of the consequences of this process is that women are written out of history, or appear solely in the role of victim. Although we know this characterisation to be false, it still holds up because of the gendered system we’re trapped in.

(<http://www.politicalsettlements.org/files/2015/12/gender.jpg>)



According to Rees, this same system is at play in the current refugee crisis and gendered, militarised responses to it. It is a bleak example of what happens when you “lose law and distort gender.” The war economy has kicked in, with those profiting from the mass exodus in Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and Macedonia making on average €8 million a day from trafficking, selling dodgy life vests, and other noble pursuits. In Slovenia, refugees are ‘welcomed’ by troops in balaclavas armed with assault rifles. Many countries have stated that they will only accept women and children or families, but no young men, which is both illegal and based upon all kinds of rotten gender assumptions. Legal, political and economic sense are being

ignored. Germany and Sweden are seemingly the only places to be adhering to international law and considering these people as the assets they are.

In response, Rees exhorted us to think globally and act locally; to harness the power of ‘we the people’; to engage with local politicians, join organisations, and challenge lazy media messages and structural inequality. It’s certainly not going to be easy, and sometimes it feels like there’s no point in trying, but knowing there’s people like her out there gives me some hope.

I spent most of this lecture screaming, “YAAAAAS!” in my head, not because I’m happy to live in such a horrible world, but because someone *gets it*. It is crucial to unpin and unpack and untangle the power dynamics at work underneath the things we take at face value. Law is not neutral. It has the potential to be as just and impartial as it claims to be, but only if we radically overhaul it.

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- **Click here to read more about the Global Justice Academy’s Student Ambassador Programme on the GJA website ([http://www.globaljusticeacademy.ed.ac.uk/students/students\\_participate](http://www.globaljusticeacademy.ed.ac.uk/students/students_participate)).**
- **Professor Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, PSRP researcher at TJI, has written more on ‘Add Women and Stir’ regarding Women in the Military. Click here to read Fionnuala’s post for JustSecurity.org (<https://www.justsecurity.org/28073/add-women-stir-women-military/>).**

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